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An Analysis of Greek Terracotta Figurines at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia

Pascale C. Schittecatte

- 1 I completed my undergraduate dissertation *Reading Faces : An Examination of Terracotta Figurine Heads in the Collection of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia* in April 2013 under the direction of Hector Williams at the University of British Columbia. The project's main aim was to assess a portion of the figurines in the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) collection, and attempt to clarify or correct information on their provenance, dating, or function. Many of these figurines had been donated as a set from the British Museum in the 1950s, although some were also acquired through smaller, personal donations. In either case, no records were made for the figurines at the time of donation. The museum's acquisition information stated that most of the figurines came from Athens. Most of the figurines also had no date ascribed to them.

A sample of the more exceptionally preserved figurines of the collection ; proposed origins, left to right : Attica, Boeotia, Asia Minor, Boeotia.



- 2 The 38 figurines chosen for my study are all fragmentary, consisting mostly of female heads. These were assessed chiefly on fabric color and composition, and style, in a

method similar to that established by R. A. Higgins in his studies at the British Museum. Works by D. B. Thompson and G. S. Merker also supported the methodological foundations of this study, among many others. Due to the general lack of specific information on acquisition, comparanda from other catalogues and research projects were the source of much of the information and many of the conclusions made concerning the terracottas in the MOA collection. Based on this process of research, importance was placed on the geographical and chronological origins of each figurine in the collection.

- 3 The major geographical subdivisions in this study included Attica, Boeotia, Tanagra, the Ionian Islands (essentially, Corfu), and Asia Minor. I suggested that nearly half of the works belong to the Attic group, about a quarter to the Boeotian group, with the rest dispersed between the remaining three groups. Chronologically, the figurines ranged from the early 5th century B.C., to the late 3rd century B.C., with some outlying examples. The figurines are all mold-made, and typically represent females wearing a strophion, wreath, or other sort of headband. Unfortunately, the fragmented nature of the figurines, and the lack of acquisition information meant that no other information on iconography could be gleaned from the works themselves, largely leaving the intended identity of the females a mystery. Nevertheless, the highly fragmented nature of many of these figurines may indicate that many were once dedications in sanctuaries, and underwent ritual decommissioning (though this assertion is rather speculative).
- 4 Although these figurines have lost a great deal of valuable information due to their lack of provenance, conclusions drawn from this study, if somewhat tentative, served to enhance and clarify the current MOA information on these pieces. It is hoped that further research on these figurines, in conjunction with other projects, may render these results more definite.

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